

## Conference Paper

# Mindfulness As a Meta-Predictor of Personal and Professional Competence of a Labor Subject

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## Abstract

**Background:** The article deals with psychological factors affecting professional development of a labor subject under the conditions of socio-economic shocks, information overloads and modernization of virtually all areas of professional activities. The research looks at psychological predictors of an individual's constructive professional development, as well as conditions for building coping skills in such critical situations as stress, conflict, frustration, etc., which are the causes of emotional burnout, professional destruction, deviant behavior, deterioration of occupational and psychological health, psychosomatic disorders, and so on. The analyzed phenomenon is a labor subject's "psychological immunity" to professional destruction stemming from multiple increase in intensity of negative impact on individual psycho-emotional state. The research defines the role of psychological immunity in constructive professional development and personal and professional competence. **Design:** Academic novelty of the article consists in analysis of the psychological construct of mindfulness, which is new to Russian science. The author views this construct as a psychological meta-predictor of personal and professional competence belonging to the structure of personal and cognitive features of individuals and ensuring effective unleashing of their personal potential. **Results:** The research has found out the link between the psychological predictors of constructive professional development and the mindfulness level of an individual, which makes it possible to broaden the understanding of individual psychological characteristics and capabilities of labor subjects in their topmost achievements, to define strategies for effective use of psychological and intellectual resources of a professional, for choice between destructive and constructive professional development in favor of the latter and for shaping personal and professional competence. **Conclusions:** On the meta-cognitive level mindfulness contributes to building a labor subject's psychological immunity for overcoming professional destruction, determines acquisition of personal and professional competences required for constructive professional development and an increase of personal and professional competence.

**Keywords:** Mindfulness, psychological predictors, meta-concept, personal and professional competence.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's complex economic and political reality, the idea of self-fulfillment and relevance of each person in society is especially topical. The problem of increasing the efficiency of a labor subject, both in the public and private sectors, is attracting more attention of researchers, politicians and managers. In this regard, solving the task of using an individual's mental resources rationally in professional activities is gaining paramount importance. There are a number of reasons for this trend. First of all, it correlates with current demands of society related to an increase in intensity of professional activities and the need to solve increasingly complex professional problems of various scale. Second, it is importance of increasing effectiveness of professional human activities (from correct understanding and quality execution of job instructions to competent making and effective implementation of managerial decisions). Third, which is the subject of this article, it is the need to provide psychological conditions for professional self-preservation and development of a labor subject, and for building personal and professional competence.

According to personnel consulting organizations [28], a quite large number of job candidates having high demands formal "signs of success" in reality can not always keep up with their job duties and do not achieve the required result of work in an uncertain or unusual environment. In most cases, this comes from underdevelopment of universal (basic) competences, which are underpinned by personal potential (personal resources).

Symanyuk & Devyatovskaya (2015) notes that in the process of performing professional activities people exercise multifaceted functions and thus fulfil and transform themselves, overcome their psychological barriers, redefine their professional expectations, seek opportunities for developing qualities of professional importance and build their professional concepts. According to Druzhilov (2014), constructive manifestations of individuality pave the way to adaptation in society, creation of individual activity styles and ways of life in general, personal development, protection of moral and spiritual health. According to Symanyuk & Devyatovskaya (2015), in acquiring personal and professional competence a special role is played by potential capabilities of an individual, the moral basis of individual behavior and reflexive behavioral skills that allow to predict successful performance. In his works Zeer (2011; 2014) notes that the constructive scenario of an individual's professional future implies the maximum self-assertion and self-fulfilment in work life and devising alternative strategies for professional development. In order to create the desired image of professional future,

“it is necessary to investigate the potential capabilities of an individual, to accurately and timely diagnose the moral basis of individual behavior and to predict successful activity and the ability to solve a wide range of non-routine tasks” [29].

In other words, in order to control the trajectory of individual professional development and turn it into a constructive direction, it is required to use technologies for diagnosing mental states and predicting possible human behavioral options. It is important to point out that this prediction is aimed not at the future, but at defining a set of recommendations for such present behavior, which will be reasonable whatever actual course future events will take.

In our opinion, the prospect of this constructive directing lies in changing a person’s mindset, way of life and subjective relation to professional activities.

## 2. Methodology

In modern society, the role of emotions in regulation of human activities is often ignored. The most common way of emotional regulation is emotional suppression because of the prevailing social attitude to emotions as negative mental phenomena requiring deterrence and repression and whose open expression is forbidden. Emotional suppression does not require special training as opposed to emotional response and emotional transformation. Most people find it difficult to resort to emotional response because techniques and methods constituting it are contrary to received social stereotypes and call for considerable courage in confronting them.

On the contrary, Milova (2010) claims that regulation of emotions means realization of emotional experiences, transformation of destructive emotions into constructive ones, as well as their biologically and socially rational use for achieving goals and satisfying needs. Regulation of emotions involves applying knowledge about emotions to solve the problem to which they alert.

Throughout the whole history of social development such qualities of a labor subject as expertise and competence have been of high value and relevance. In this connection, there is a need to ensure psychological immunity of labor subjects in the process of their development and building their personal and professional competence.

The term “psychological immunity” is used by various authors [18, 23, 26] to describe an individual’s ability to oppose psycho-traumatic factors and resistance to influence of the social environment putting pressure on the said individual. The term is often understood as a total set of moral and ethical qualities of an individual, laying the

foundation for his/her psychological resilience to destructive influences of the environment, while psychological resilience is usually understood as a general system of phenomena through which an individual can withstand the influence and pressure of various psycho-traumatic factors.

In the modern world the concept of psychological immunity is relevant in various areas of life. For instance, in global politics [36], this construct is used in devising confrontation strategies in information wars and effectively protecting interests of the state in the information and psychological sphere. Such strategy consists in information protection of citizens' consciousness through "immunization", or development of critical thinking. According to Namakanov (2010), psychological immunity of a person is a system of mental protection against psychological impact exerted by another person and nurturing of healthy skepticism towards offered information. Kireychev (2015) defines psychological immunity as an individual's ability to maintain and restore his/her mental health through using psychological knowledge.

We understand psychological immunity as an individual's ability to independently predict and prevent stress in daily and professional activities, and to develop frustration tolerance to various stressors, i.e. to correct frustrative reactions making destructive (unproductive) ones constructive (productive) by increasing the level of mindfulness. Transformation of destructive emotions into constructive ones promotes productivity and interpersonal interaction. Constructive reactions are "intropeditive (perception of obstacles as favorable and beneficial to self-development) or intropersistive (persistence in achieving the goal and resolving frustrating situations)" [24]. As a general factor, when measuring such psychological characteristics as resilience, tolerance of ambiguity, psychological well-being, coping strategies, contributing to strategies for overcoming crises, Vindeker & Klimenskyh (2016) consider the concept of "anti-fragility", expressed in the use of stress for the benefit of development. An individual tolerant to frustration is able not only to confront stress, conflict, psychological barriers, etc., but, which is more important, to perceive these barriers as a potential opportunity for self-development, personal and professional growth. Recognition and unrepressed expression of emotions contribute to personal development and unleashing the utmost personal potential.

The importance of mindfulness as an individual trait and a condition for constructive personal development has been noted by both domestic and foreign researchers ([1, 2, 5, 7, 17, 20, 27]; and many others). In Western psychology the concept of mindfulness is described as the ability to be fully aware of what is taking place in the present without any loss of information [3]. According to Langer & Moldoveanu (2000), mindfulness

means an open and flexible state of mind corresponding to "openness to novelty", i.e. the process of actively seeking new directions. In this state, an individual is aware of being "here and now", open to the context and the prospects of the situation. Development of mindfulness is expressed in positive affect, decrease of emotional burnout, growing creativity and charisma, as well as improvement of the subjective evaluation of the person's own life. In the works of various authors [12, 13] notes that the main property of mindfulness is the awareness of the ever-changing nature of things and the intention to search for novelty. Mindfulness makes it possible to evaluate another person and to consider positive and negative actions based on rational judgment rather than stereotypes adopted in society or patterns and beliefs accepted unconsciously. Mindfulness gives control over experience and develops the skill of finding advantages in disadvantages and vice versa. Such attitude shows that there are no decisively negative events in life so the emotions from the "right/wrong" assessment increase the likelihood of an individual's seeing of his/her own life as perceivably trouble-free.

The logic of such conclusions actualizes the use of the meta-systemic approach [21] as a methodological basis for explaining the phenomenon of mindfulness. Karpov (2004) distinguishes a metasystem level in the mental structure, which is its highest and at the same time open level, i.e. it is through it that level the system interacts with other systems and develops in such interaction. "Meta-systemic" means that a given matter belongs to the system and at the same time is outside of it. The concept of meta-systematicity denotes the very fact of including a particular system in other systems of higher orders, as well as its interaction with them [22].

From our point of view, the rationale for meta-conception and distinguishing of a meta-concept is determined by the need for a clearer understanding and explanation of the relation between psychological predictors of psychological immunity and constructive professional development of a labor subject.

### 3. Results

Based on the study of psychological factors of individual professional development [30], it is possible to highlight the following psychological predictors of personal and professional competence:

- personal qualities (reflection, resilience, tolerance to uncertainty, pursuit of self-development);

- motives (internal: life-purpose orientations, satisfaction (with life, labor, profession), perceived well-being; external: aspiration level, subjective activity, communicativeness);
- values (material and moral ones, professional identity) and a number of other variables.

It should be noted that the above-mentioned and many other psychological predictors of personal and professional competences are closely related to the level and range of professional competences. This is confirmed by the data we obtained in the study of a number of individual psychological characteristics in doctors (69) and mid-level medical personnel (73) of state medical institutions in Ekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk region [31]. Analysis and comparison of the results obtained among the medical practitioners of the higher level (doctors) and the middle level (nurses) showed a substantial positive correlation of life-purpose orientations as well as other psychological characteristics (satisfaction with work, sense of involvement, resilience, etc.) with the level of job responsibilities and professional competences (ibid).

## 4. Discussion

When interpreting the results of the study the account was taken of position differences and specific functions of medical professions, which for mid-range medical personnel are a local nature of the actions and defined processes implying a limited area of accountability in addition to clearly specified job descriptions. On the contrary, doctors are responsible for the entire treatment course, the positive outcome of which demands, on the one hand, an integrative approach within the rigid framework of medical and economic standards, and, on the other hand, out-of-the-box and analytical thinking.

That research has shown that a substantial contribution to the development of individual personal and professional competence is made by constant reflection directly on the object of the performed activity, its recognition and apprehension, as well as tools and methods of performing it. It is an individual's recognition of his/her professional work as the goal of self-assertion that determines the trend towards increasing the level of professionalism.

According to Golubev (2012), although attention and awareness are indispensable signs of normal functioning, awareness can be considered as increased attention (or awareness) to the current experience. Pugovkina & Shilnikova (2014) notes that the

ability to concentrate, to understand the current internal and external experience and to control the process of awareness is an important factor of stress resistance and psychological well-being. The ability to recognize the subjectivity of the inner picture of reality is therefore seen as an effective way of coping with various forms of psychological stress (anxiety, fears, irritation, anger, fixed thoughts).

As mindfulness is essential to a person's full functioning and is associated with a sense of well-being, its reduction accompanies various neurotic disorders. Many authors have shown the possibility of purposeful development of mindfulness as a certain ability, or skill. Strengthening mindfulness leads to increased well-being, reduces psychological stress and stressful reactions [6]. In his review on the cognitive functions of the brain Engel (1980) notes that "classical theories of sensory processing view the brain as a passive, stimulus-driven device"; however, there are more and more studies emphasizing the constructive nature of perception [9, 10, 14, 16]. Thus, the emphasis is shifted to the active and highly selective aspects of this process. Being aware, a person can choose the reaction leading to the desired outcome. This makes mindfulness a factor that influences not only the available knowledge, but also the direction of an individual's future actions. Rueda, Posner & Rothbart, (2005) claims that "brain mechanisms associated with attentional control can be improved by training and that this improvement produces a benefit in behavioral measures of competence." So, over time, mindfulness can become a mode of being, a way of life or a personality trait, and not just a practice that briefly brings consciousness to a certain temporary state with the help of some practice. This can be imagined as a transition from states of mindfulness to mindfulness as a personal trait, or characteristic, manifesting itself as a more persistent and sustainable ability.

According to Siegel (2009), mindfulness is an integrated state of consciousness that creates its internal setup and connectivity and allows selective direction of information flow processing. Such resonant state can give rise to a sense of satisfaction, perceived well-being and purpose.

Analysis of academic literature and the results of the conducted empirical research show that the construct of mindfulness makes a significant contribution to increasing the level of frustration tolerance, job satisfaction, perceived well-being, self-control, positive self-esteem, empathy, etc. In this context, it is quite apt to position the mindfulness concept as a psychological meta-predictor of psychological immunity and constructive professional development of a labor subject.

## 5. Conclusions

The "mindfulness" concept can be considered as a new modern prospect for understanding the realm of professional activities. The author sees the way to increase the level of personal and professional competence of a labor subject in raising the level of his/her mindfulness. Establishment of the relation between the psychological predictors of constructive professional development and the level of mindfulness allows to broaden understanding of individual psychological characteristics and capabilities in a person's topmost achievements and to set out strategies for effective using a professional's psychological and intellectual resources, for the choice between destructive and constructive professional development in favor of the latter and for building personal and professional competence.

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